

Work Life Balance: What are the main challenges for women in the corporate sector? Is it related to their family life?

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## **Abstract**

**A study to gain insights into the main factors and challenges that Irish women working in the corporate sector experience in relation to their work life balance and whether or not it is related to their family life outside of work.**

Work Life Balance (WLB) is a very important aspect of the working environment but is often neglected by employees. There has been a lot of research carried out on the topic of WLB however there has been little research conducted on the challenges women face in relation to WLB. Moving away from traditional times, society has changed from the prejudices women used to face when climbing up the corporate environment. This dissertation focuses on the main challenges for women working in the corporate sector in relation to their career progression and WLB. This research's main aim was to identify the academic literature researched that examines some of the challenges related to WLB, for the individual, their work life and other aspects of life. This was carried out to help individuals experiencing work life imbalance or help avoid imbalance in the future.

A quantitative method was carried out in this study using a survey among women working full-time and part-time with different marital status around 6 different companies in total to gain insights into the main challenges that women face in balancing work expectations and life pressures and responsibilities. The overall results showed the main difficulties women faced in summarising their WLB were trying to meet work demands while facing responsibilities outside of work (childcare responsibilities, family responsibilities), the majority of respondents felt they could improve their WLB and a large portion of respondents noted that their employers could help them to improve their WLB at work with less workloads, recognition for extra work and hard work, introduce flexi time/flexible working hours. The discussion concluding this paper brought together data collected from the surveys and academic literature researched. Recommendations discuss the future of work life balance issues and measures that can be put in place at home and at work to help improve self-satisfaction. The aim of this dissertation is to look at the main challenges that women face regarding their work life (climbing up the corporate ladder) and family life and their coping styles. The objective is to achieve both family and work satisfaction.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Irish Women in the Corporate Sector

According to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland (2015) the population of women in Ireland has increased to 2,315,553 in 2011 from 1,482,488 in 1971, a dramatic increase in 40 years for population. Also in 2011 the number of females aged 15 and over in education was 1,837,152 (CSO(A), 2011). The number of females who completed third level education with a degree or higher was 413,257 compared to the male rate of 326,735 overall there are more females graduating from third level education than males (CSO(B), 2011). The average life expectancy of a female in 2006 to reach 75 years old was 12.1% compared to 8.4% in 1926 showing an increase in life expectancy (CSO(C), 2006). The average age of a mother in 2013 was 32, conceiving in marriage was 34 years old and outside of marriage was 29 years old compared to 1980 when the average age of a mother was 29 years old, conceiving within marriage at 29 years old and outside of marriage 22 years old (CSO (D), 2013). Finally the rate of females in employment recorded in the first quarter of 2015 was 880,100 compared to the male rate of 1,049,400 identifying that there are more men working this year than women so far (CSO (E), 2015). Statistics show that from before 2004 to date there has been more male's employed than females. There are more women in Ireland than men, more women have graduated from third level education than men and the life expectancy of women is longer than men. Females are having children at an older age however it still remains that more men are in employment than women. These statistics show a promising future for women in Ireland in relation to third level graduates and life expectancy.

Likewise, recently at an IBEC and Department of Justice and Equality conference (A) (2014) that was aimed at promoting and supporting gender balanced leadership, there was reference to women in the corporate sector and some of the main challenges they faced. Some facts highlighted at the start of the conference comment that globally women are under-represented in senior positions in corporate life, despite the fact they represent half the workforce and more than half of university graduates. In early 2014, women accounted for only 10.5% of the board members of the largest listed companies in Ireland whereas, for the EU the average of women on the boards of the largest listed companies was 18.6%. In 2011, Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding encouraged companies to sign the

"Women on the Board Pledge for Europe" to help reach 30% of women on the boards of listed companies by 2015 and 40% by 2020.

The aims of the conference:

1. Raise awareness of the benefits of gender balance in decision-making,
2. Share knowledge to maximise talent of well-educated women and support their career into senior decision-making roles to achieve gender balance leadership.

Ms. Frances Fitzgerald T.D (Minister for justice and equality) outlined women's educational and employment attainment was positive, however the rate of females entering into senior positions was slow. Mr. Larry Murrin- (IBEC President) stated there has been an increase of women in senior management roles, however the issue of gender balance in organisations remains. Mr Murrin addressed that gender imbalance in organisations has become a strategic importance. Ms. Barbara Nolan- (Head of the European Commission Representation in Ireland) commented that in Europe 60% of college graduates were women but 81% of board members were men. Ms Nolan added that nowadays women can have a family and a career. Ms. Avivah Wittenberg-Cox (CEO of 20-first Consulting- Building Gender-Balanced Businesses) outlined the importance of understanding young women today will help with gender balance in businesses. Ms. Wittenberg-Cox acknowledged that 'glass ceilings' and 'invisible barriers' for women's advancement were a minor element of the major problem being the structure of the company. Both men and women have a 50/50 entry rate however 80% of senior management were men (IBEC, 2014). From this reading it can be suggested that there is currently a gender imbalance among management roles in businesses within Ireland.

The quantity of females working in the corporate sector to date was different in Ireland many years ago, Irish women played a traditional role in society and little engaged in paid work. The independent Irish state from 1921 outlines how women were associated as carers and home makers. Kiely & Leane (2012) carried out a study on forty two Irish women that have worked in Ireland from the 1930's - 1950's and expose their working life stories in Ireland, the main challenges they experienced as female workers and the conditions of work they experienced. Of the forty two women interviewed thirty seven were married, thirty three of whom left work once they married or fell pregnant. On average they had worked 12-13 years, the remaining women who didn't marry had a long working life of around 40 years. The married participants work histories show that many of them had combined work with

domestic responsibilities at home. Twenty seven of married women engaged in some sort of paid work after marriage and only four of these women had continuous employment meaning twenty three were involved in paid work at some stage during married life. Clerical and office work was a popular choice for women to work in, it was perceived to provide women with a protective environment to work in. The short working hours attracted most applicants with reasonably paid wages.

From the study carried out by Kiely & Leane (2012) there were four main findings including:

1. A variety of views of working in an office among the participants. Participants that enjoyed it had a respectful relationship with their boss and really respected them, Requested time off was not a problem and found the workplace to be a good working environment and pleasant atmosphere.
2. However some participants gave a different view of working in an office recalling it as a very formal, disciplined and hierarchal place to work, punctuality was expected and monitored closely, and employees were not allowed to talk to each other unless it was about work.
3. Female appearance in particular was expected to be neat and employees who attracted the wrong kind of attention were punished.
4. During the 1900's women were primary household carers. Over the years more and more women entered into the workforce, however many still resigned from work once they were married or fell pregnant.

## 1.2. Work Life Balance Overview

Work life balance (WLB) is an important and interesting topic both in the business environment and in academic research. The majority of WLB studies are done in relation to organisational policies, HR management, employee engagement or absenteeism. There are many studies carried out in relation to employee wellbeing however when studies comment on “family life” many describe it spending time with a spouse or children and fail to include siblings, parents etc. There are many definitions to WLB all generalising around the same concept. Chauhan (2010) focused many ideas in his article around the topic of WLB mentioning work life and family life are an important factor as many people regard these two aspects very important in their lives. He included work family conflict occurs when these aspects clash therefore a good WLB can be achieved when there is no conflict. Chauhan also added WLB is about having control over your work loads, where and how you work, this is linked to how the individual is treated by their organisation and it is also about balancing what the individual does for enjoyment. If the individual is trying their best at work but not enjoying it there is no satisfaction. Satisfaction and achievement are motivators that increase enjoyment in life.

It is reasonable to argue that WLB is having the ability to juggle home life and work life along with a social life, exercise, emotional intelligence and remaining healthy, all at a balance that is comfortable for the individual and is something that all employees (male and female) and employers should be striving towards, as it can be seen to help to balance employment and family, caring responsibilities along with a social life. Biron, Cooper & Burke (2014) Believe work and family life have separate responsibilities requiring your attention, physical presence and time often causing friction with the other. Not only can WLB be suggested a problem for women who caring for a family but for all female employees whether married, single, separated, divorced, widowed in a relationship etc. Biron, Cooper & Burke (2014) Believe Companies can help their employees to WLB with training programmes and time management and there are several consequences to work life imbalance including work-family conflict, job stress and depression can also be symptoms. Work life imbalance can affect the organisation too with low levels of productivity and low employee engagement which Biron, Cooper & Burke address suggesting it's in the company's best interest to get involved. They identify Job stress may arise from direct demands from work and its workload, it could arise from interactions with colleagues or can be caused by conflicts with work and non-work priorities. One main finding in the reading is how Job stress badly effects employees, their health including depression alcohol abuse and physical health damage,

their families with high levels of divorce and infertility related to high levels of stress and the breakdown of families also. The reading includes that Job stress and ill health caused by job stress can be treated by introducing time management and organising skills however many employees fail to reduce stress to improve work life balance.

Russell, Smyth, Lyons & O Connell (2002) believe that over the past number of years there has been a dramatic increase in the labour force especially among women in Ireland and this has been a very important indicator of economic growth in Ireland. A big part of this is the percentage of women moving away from traditional norms and moving from the home to the work place. While this increase may have a positive effect on the evolution of employment it has brought attention to the importance of childcare and the importance of women themselves in relation to their needs.

### **1.3. Aims and Objectives of this study**

This study firstly aims to investigate the main challenges women face in relation to their WLB that are currently working in the corporate environment. The corporate environment can be suggested to be a strict hard working environment with big workloads that require a lot of attention and can be seen as a stressful environment.

This study secondly aims to investigate if the challenges that women face in relation to their WLB are connected to their family life. For example if they experiencing different WLB challenges depending on their family life which includes if they are married, single, divorced, separated, widowed or in a civil relationship.

The study thirdly aims to investigate if the challenges that women face in relation to their WLB are connected to their employers/organisations. For example if women face WLB challenges because of pressure from their employer/organisation.

Finally this study aims to investigate if their employer/organisation can help to improve their employees WLB and any challenges they may be experiencing.

Young working women have different expectations to the lives of their mothers. Women now can have a family and work too as suggested in the conference held by IBEC (2014). Achieving their goals and concentrating on their career enabling them to reach the top of the corporate environment is an ideal opportunity. Gone are the days of segregated jobs, low-paid part time jobs to bring in a second wage for the family struggles, now women are

striving and driven to transform the working environment for the better. Franks (1999) speaks highly of young educated women in the developed world. She highlights how they are performing in education even better than before, with more job opportunities young women are trying to achieve success and not lagging behind. She adds that in the past the majority of women would fall pregnant and become mothers at an early age simply because there was little else to offer, but gone are the days of educational stereotypes. Young girls are becoming more serious about achieving the best result from education and having a career.

As a result more employees in the corporate sector are interested in looking for jobs that allow them to be more flexible at work with less stress loads that helps them to achieve different goals at different stage of their working lives. Therefore by doing this they pay more attention to balancing their working commitments and personal commitments.

#### **1.4. Structure of the study**

This study is divided into eight chapters. Introduction: The first chapter contains information and literature about females working in the corporate sector. Giving examples, statistics and definitions on the main challenges involved when women began to work and the labour force grew. It also gives an overview of WLB and its main literature. It identifies the gaps in literature research WLB and personal wellbeing. The main problems in the research to date, also the rationale of this chosen study has been shown in the introduction chapter. This is to show the reader why the research was worthy of studying.

Literature Review: In the second chapter contains the literature review, here all theory and definitions related to this topic are presented to help the reader to gain a better understanding of the topic in question and the main issues around it. This chapter explains to readers the challenges of WLB and consequences of work life imbalance for both the individual, their families and organisations,

Research Methodology: The third chapter shows the research methods that were carried out in this study. This chapter explains why the author/researcher choose a quantitative research method. The Methodology chapter describes the sample, ethical considerations, data collection and finally the analysis process.



Research Findings: The fourth chapter contains a discussion and the main findings that were collected from the survey conducted. It shows descriptive statistics, and the main challenges of WLB for females and in their words their feelings on the issue in hand.

Discussion: The fifth chapter contains a discussion on the topic presented and on each finding identified in the previous chapter. It connects the findings to the literature presented in the third chapter. The research question is presented again.

Conclusion: The sixth chapter provides a summary of the reading in total and the main findings in relation to the question that was presented at the start and throughout the reading.

Recommendations: Finally in the last chapter recommendations are made moving on into the future.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This chapter provides the readers with an overview of the present Academic Literature collected and analysed related to the topic of WLB and the topic of women working in the Corporate Sector. It outlines the various factors contributing to the main challenges Women face in relation to their WLB in the Corporate Sector. It also presents data that questions whether this challenge can be related to their Family life. This Chapter has many different sections. Firstly the topic of Family Satisfaction and Work Satisfaction are provided to give readers an insight to the potential outcome of WLB and the challenges surrounding both. Next it outlines the topic of Career Progression, commenting on career advancement and some difficulties that can arise during Career Progression for women in particular. Next topic identifies some of the main benefits of WLB followed by some of the main Consequences of Work Life Imbalance. Psychological Health topic follows that outlines the importance of an employee's mental health and the harm it can have on the individual's wellbeing, also the pressures Work Life and Home Life can effect an employee's mental health and harm it. Followed after, the topic benefits of wellbeing describes the importance for wellbeing for an individual and the factors that can contribute to this. Next the Psychology of women topic surrounds the opinions of success working women and how generations have changed this opinion. This topic deals with new generations of working individuals and there new approach to working, the topic of technology and corporate culture is closely linked to this topic and shows a change in working patterns and work ethic. Continuing on the topic of the Glass Ceiling that is often talked about in literature surrounding women trying to progress their career. The topic focuses on the disadvantages a Glass ceiling can have on a company and its employees. It can create a negative atmosphere and put pressure on employees. Competitiveness in the Corporate Sector topic gives the reader of this thesis an insight into the corporate sector and how important it is for companies to constantly be innovative and remain competitive. Lastly a summary is presented to conclude the Literature review in total.

## **2.1. Family Satisfaction**

It can be argued that Family Satisfaction refers to an employee's relationship with their family and home life satisfaction can mean achieving a close relationship with family and friends while also gaining personal happiness. The term "Family Satisfaction" that is used in this Dissertation is not just limited to immediate family such as spouse, children, but also extends to uncles, nieces, cousins and other relatives. This term was used to help the participant focus and not get confused with "Life satisfaction" that can be suggested to be satisfaction with family and work. According to Calvo-Salguero (2011) Work and Family are two of the most important roles of one's life showing no surprise that a lot of academic literature surrounds the topic. There are many studies that talk about both family satisfaction and work satisfaction that can effect an individual's wellbeing however there are little on just family satisfaction that can effect an individual. Hill (2005) states that family satisfaction play's an important role in an individual's wellbeing and can influence work performance. Therefore higher levels of family satisfaction can lead to higher levels of work satisfaction and employee engagement. However this contradicts a reading by Bhowon (2013) based on work family conflict and satisfaction which record's that in fact work is one of the most important roles for a male while family is considered to be one of the most important roles for a female. According to the Family Satisfaction Scale (Carver, 1992) it measures the overall satisfaction with one's family showing different components to determine whether satisfaction is positive/negative. Components that show positive relationships are emotional such as cohesion, communication, and expressiveness, components that show negative relationships such as loneliness can indicate lack of satisfaction in one's personal life. In its format, the Family Satisfaction Scale determines the overall emotional satisfaction an individual has obtained from his/her family. However Barraca, Yarto & Olea (2000) disagree and identified there was a need to update the family satisfaction scale due to a variety of problems and limitations including poor levels of validity and reliability. The construction of F.S.A.S Family Satisfaction Adjectives Scale is associated with the feeling experienced while the individual is interacting with their family and not on global judgement. They argue that the study of emotion is in fact more suitable for the scale than satisfaction.

## 2.2. Work Satisfaction

Paton et al. (2003) argues there are mainly two elements that determine work satisfaction 1. These are intrinsic elements to the individual for example expectations of the job, personal demands, and 2. Elements that are related to the job including how much support is received from management and what is expected of the individual in relation to their skills and characteristics. In a study carried out by Zou (2015) on work satisfaction it is seen that by gender women are more satisfied in their jobs than men. The main reason for this is the difference in what both genders seek from employment causing different satisfaction levels. It was found that overall women had a higher rate of job satisfaction compared to men. Women working part time achieved the highest rate of work satisfaction followed by women working full time and men achieving the lowest rate. The study also showed that work orientations differ between males and females. Men were more likely to value extrinsic and intrinsic rewards whereas women valued working conditions and relationships. Showing that men and women's work satisfaction is measured by different elements and what might cause satisfaction for men may not for women.

Chittenden & Ritchie (2011) Suggest there are many negative consequences for work life imbalance, for working parents negative consequences involves less family interaction, conflicts in relationships, less interaction with children's experiences, depression, greater likelihood of alcohol abuse, and a decrease in their quality of life. They also suggest at work negative consequences include psychological stress from work life conflict, decreased work satisfaction, and increased absenteeism. From this reading it can be suggested there are many challenges associated with work life balancing for all individuals, often causing a lot of strain and effecting the wellbeing of the individual. Trying to balance both work life and family life can be difficult at times and in some professions more times than others. Coffey, Anderson, Zhao, Liu, & Zhang, J. (2009) suggest that with new generations of employees entering the workforce a new challenge arises for the more traditional view that work will suffer because family life always come first is changing over time. They comment young driven employees tend to be more ambitious at work and family life will take a back seat. Van Steenbergen, and Kluwer, & Karney (2014) argue individuals that experience a positive WLB are more likely to transfer this positivity to their family life by interacting with their partners in an optimistic and cheerful manner. Also it states that if individuals are in a positive position at work, having a high energy level and good time management skills should in turn help them to be more able and willing to invest in their partners. Therefore resulting

in a positive family life and work life. There are challenges to try and balance work and life however this study has shown that a positive WLB can benefit family life and marital life.

### **2.3. Career Progression**

In D'Agostino's (2011) recent American study it was identified that the majority of women working in state government who had progressed in their careers were unmarried/were not parents. D'Agostino also makes reference to female nurses that used WLB practices such as flexibility fell behind male doctors in relation to career progression and as a result more men progressed in their career even though it is a female-dominated field. D'Agostino believes that career progression is one of the main drivers for enthusiastic employees to try and reach their full potential within an organisation. Career advancement aimed at advancing career success can be difficult for employees. Likewise in a similar research by Doherty (2004) of career progression it was argued that many women do not progress their career into senior management roles because of the long hours associated with the job. In the research it is believed the equal opportunity approach in most organisations draws attention to women's "difference" to men and their need for special treatment with flexibility and less working hours. This statement reinforces the role of women as care givers at home. Although some organisations help with equal opportunities for promotion and providing flexible working arrangements. The key theme in this reading is that the requirement for long working hours in senior management roles work against women but with the help of WLB initiatives may help to overcome this issue. However this view is not seen by Walsh (2012) that argues the issue of career progression is associated in whether females actually wish to progress in their career or not. It is stated that women's aspirations and preferences are often not met when career progression takes place therefore many women chose not to progress in their career but stated that many women do chose to progress on in their career. However one important result from the research found that women who were in senior law positions were parents, therefore regardless of their marital status they could progress in the organisation if they wished to.

The issue of career progression surrounding women can be seen among the younger generation As Gatrell suggests in her book "Embodying Womens Work" (2008) while lecturing medical students she asked them to picture their future and the response shocked her. Young women studying third level education seeing themselves in a career as high as a GP because they are under the impression to have a family and shouldn't try to excel to become

a doctor if they want a family. Also she noticed while in discussion in class doctors were always referred to as “he”. The male students response was different, male students were always encouraged to enter the surgeon specialities and could also have a family if they wished. Gatrell states how women in senior roles are treated more harshly than men and every decision made is questioned even with a significant increase in women at senior roles there still remains an imbalance. The existence of the “glass ceiling” remains an issue and Gatrell suggests that if women were to reach senior roles they would fail to make as much money as men or be treated the same and continues on how women progress vertically around the business but not often upwards. Gatrell explains that women continue to be overlooked in the business world because of the issue of social misconceptions and traditional views.

#### **2.4. Work Life Balance Benefits**

There are many benefits of managing a good WLB. However it’s finding the right balance that remains a challenge. In order to find a good balance it’s essential to prioritise some aspects of daily life and organising correct time management. Kellet’s (2011) Article on WLB outlines the benefits of WLB and the main aspects of work life Imbalance. The example used in the article of a student in Australia, her parents’ divorce while in college causing a big imbalance in her WLB juggling college, studying and home life. Stress and exhaustion led to a burn out, however taking a year out changed her priorities and passed her second year of college, enjoying the year. Her classes, social life and personal goals were all equal priorities. This is a primary example that making priorities and organising time management will increase WLB therefore increasing benefits. In a research by Quick, Gavin, Cooper, & Quick (2004) about WLB in the work place, gave a very different approach of WLB and ways to prioritise, argued that when work or family life spills over individuals have to prioritise their emotions and work from your heart as well as your head. Requiring the balancing act of competition, collaboration and cooperation. With professional expertise it can provide healthy work. The reading also comments on the importance of working relationships in the working environment, as many employees still fear over job security and job loss overcoming financial difficulties from the recent financial crisis. The theme of this research shows that achievement and connection are important for mental health by working with feelings, emotions from heads and hearts can lead to a good WLB. Chimote & Srivastav (2013) Believe If the balancing act of work and family life can be obtained there are many benefits as a result

including job satisfaction and autonomy also job security, less stress and improved health for employees. It identified the organisation also achieves benefits for implementing good work life practices including reduced absenteeism and turnover, improved productivity and corporate image, and an increase of loyalty and retention.

A recent study carried out by Downes & Koekemoer (2011) on the challenges and benefits of implementing flexitime in organisations gave a good insight into employee's views on the topic. The main challenges identified for implementing flexitime included participants believed maintaining performance/productivity was challenging, they felt it could hinder achieving deadlines because other commitments would force to put off workload. One main challenge identified during the study was the lack of knowledge the employees had about flexitime, what it involved and how it worked. However there are many benefits identified from participants of using flexitime in the organisation for both the employees and company. For employees benefits included managing both their personal and work life, employees found they had a good WLB because they had a sense of control and freedom over their workload. Also participants mentioned the psychological benefits like reduced levels of stress and anxiety and increased levels of energy. Finally organisational benefits included being flexible in relation to deadlines and meeting client's needs, improving overall organisational productivity and performance. Also employee loyalty, commitment and motivation increases employees level of concentration and energy to contribute to organisational productivity. Summing up that there can be some risks involved with implementing WLB practices in organisations including flexitime however the benefits involved help both employees and organisations. From Research it has been suggested that a popular practice many organisations are involved in when it comes to helping their employees achieve a good WLB is flexitime. It allows employees to be a bit more flexible in terms of working hours if needs be, they can come in late to work or leave early.

## **2.5. Consequences of Work Life Imbalance**

One important factor that has been linked to work life imbalance is burnout. Schaufeli & Enzmann (1998) believed burnout was closely linked to the draining of one's mental resources caused by job stress that's identified as a work indicator of psychological health. Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker & Schaufeli (2005) outline that certain job sectors or job titles have been linked to burnout for example demands that require a lot of attention resulting in a built up of stress that sometimes spill over to home life. The research stated that home and

job demands are similar that stress and attitudes build up and can often spill over to the other domain causing burnout affecting mental health. It was suggested in the research that improved technology has blurred the boundaries between home and work life, suggesting that employees find it hard to switch off from work/home life and constantly feeling responsible for both aspects in life at the same time, causing a lot of strain on the individual. This strain and stress can cause a lot of personal problems and can spiral out of control. In a similar research carried out by Aziz, Adkins, Walker & Wuensch (2010) about work life imbalance a big factor contributing to individuals becoming “workaholics” was closely related to new technology and the concept of wireless internet laptops and work mobiles, employees are always connected to their work. It was identified as a result companies are becoming more competitive promoting over-time and working weekends in order to get ahead of competitors, often being linked to the culture of the organisation it clearly shows some employees unable to find the right balance and constantly feeling the pressures and strains from both aspects. The research also comments that this work addiction like any other addiction can cause individuals' to neglect all other aspects of their lives, stating they are intrinsically motivated and get trills off prolonged workloads and working overtime to see the best results, and unfortunately as a consequence family life takes a back seat and work takes over.

## **2.6. Psychological Health**

Psychological health also referred to as mental health is described as

“A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

(World Health Organisation, 2005, P.19).

Mental health is how we feel about ourselves, about others and how we are able to meet the demands of everyday life. According to Mental Health Ireland (2015) mental ill health are mental problems that any individual can experience in everyday life during stressful times. The reading states everyone suffers from mental health problems from temporary problems/demands and how mental health problems can affect the capabilities of the individual and if left untreated can become serious over time. For example mood swings and broken sleep caused by work, which usually occurs on a temporary basis and relate to the



demands of a certain situation. In a reading about health and wellbeing by Perrewe & Ganster (2006) the research identifies the problems work-family conflict can have on an employee's physical and mental health. The physical health problems including high blood pressure, health-related behaviours including unhealthy diets and psychological strain including negative emotions and dissatisfactions factors that are effected by work-family conflict. There were emotions in the research including anger, frustration and depression associated with Work-Family conflict and dissatisfactions included work/family dissatisfaction as well as one's personal life. The linkages mentioned in the research between Work-Family conflict and Psychological health of the individual are strong and can have serious effects. Likewise in a reading on Psychological health also by Ganster & Perrewe (2011) the literature examines the relationship between an individual's psychological and physiological health and wellbeing with work relationships. It indicates there are correlations between work relationships and WLB. The results show that having good work relationships individuals can balance social relationships with demands of everyday life, they trust and support their colleagues and have a sense of control and influence over others, and they are genuine and have effective behaviours towards others. The results also show if there is little relationship it will have the opposite effect. The objective of the research was to show that with a good working relationship will develop friendships and alliances easily which is critical to create a healthy WLB. Swanson (2012) identified a number of Conclusions about the relationship between work and Psychological Health for employees including: There are clearly a lot of benefits of employment for example the social aspect and interaction between Employees and financial factors. It was noted being unemployed or losing a job causes mental health problems which could have long lasting effects for the individual and one of the biggest impact is the financial loss associated with job loss and being unemployed. Swanson also identified good healthy employment aspects of the characteristics of the job will enhance work satisfaction and wellbeing and bad unhealthy working environments causing stress and frustration will result in low satisfaction and wellbeing. One important point made in the reading was every individual is different in relation to importance of roles, work life and career and it's important to understand this, and also that work and family life can have a positive or negative influence on the other, and If one spills over into the other it can have a good or bad outcome. The research concluded that the relationship between work and Psychological health has been studied to show individuals the dangers and benefits of working life, which is due to Globalisation, cultural changes and technology advances work

life is becoming unpredictable and these changes will challenge practices currently in place that involve work and Psychological Health and wellbeing.

## **2.7. Benefits of Well-Being**

Okhuysen, Lepak, Lee Ashcraft, Labianca, Smith & Steensma (2015) suggest that the workplace can help employees' wellbeing in many ways and there are also many other factors that contribute to help one's well-being. They suggest doing everyday work tasks, the work place plays a big role for employees who may be experiencing work-family conflict and due to its nature of formal work environment, work tasks, company structure, deadlines and development of goals, the work place can provide the best environment for an employee to negotiate personal preferences, roles or conflicts and form a sense of identity. The research states that it helps employees psychologically by being supportive of task completion and interaction between colleagues and In short, work is the place where people live, act and interact with others. However this is not the same view taken by Brizga and Peks (2015) as they believe stress at work is a big factor for mental illness caused by psychological risks that arise. They state that almost one third of the population in the EU suffer from stress at work and believe the goal is to avoid bad moods and assess the psychological work risk factors which is done by acknowledging that problems will arise and to try learn to overcome them. The main problem identified in the reading was that employees failed to recognise the psychological risks that are involved in the work environment and were never taken into full consideration in the workplace.

Glavin & Schieman (2014) state that In order to see the benefits of ones wellbeing they have to be in control of their personal and work life, stating often individuals believe they are in control but this is not the case. Glavin & Schieman believe there is a strong relationship between perceived control and psychological distress in the working environment, this is when there is job insecurity. They also believe a stressful role in the organisation is associated with a high degree of uncertainty and instability and uncertainty in the future of employment lowers the level of control and increases the level of strain and identifies that higher levels of control and wellbeing result in lower levels of distress. It was also identified the effect working conditions has on mental health, however with a personal sense of control there are many benefits of wellbeing. In a study by T.S (2015) on employee mental health comments

that people with life meaning and direction have reduced risks of mental illness. The study comments that this can also have an impact in the workplace when employees are not engaged in their work it suggests they are disconnected emotionally from work and colleagues and are not as productive as engaged employees and without direction, drive and having life meaning the wellbeing of employees suffer therefore with enthusiasm and being optimistic employees will have more control over their personal and work life increasing the benefits of their wellbeing.

## **2.8. The Psychology of Women**

Paludi (2008) presents several stories from the 1970's within the online book "The Psychology of Women at Work: Challenges and Solutions for our female Workforce" which shows that in the 1970s there were a lot of opinions about what working women could do and couldn't do. One story by Linda Gordon highlights several struggles she went through while at college and working. The main issue that women were always undermined and degraded by employers many years ago, being 1 of 2 female lecturers at a law college she was proud and regularly told students the gender discrimination she received from the college. She recalls seeing few women in senior management positions around the world while speaking at conferences and reflecting on her experience with a sense of pride and achievement she views life that working towards your dream comes from learning that women are constantly being undermined in the work place and to take control and work towards personal goals. Being constantly undermined pushed Linda to do her best. Becoming an Equal Employment Opportunities Officer and writing handbooks she helps employers/organisations with sexual harassment, employment equality and employment discrimination.

Michelle Wildgrube also highlights the main challenges faced when working in a strict working environment requiring long hours and big workloads. Having a work life imbalance can put a strain on the employee which happened to Michelle. Michelle's story gives evidence that having a family and a good WLB is very achievable once the individual prioritises and maintains good time management. Her organisation culture at the law firm was strict and discriminated against women who became pregnant and when becoming pregnant Michelle was denied part time work. With no option but to quit to work closer to home and Michelle is now a partner in a law firm and talks highly of her all female team. Referring to the firm as "we" instead of "I" she sees the firm as a network of relationships working together with a

strong bond and understanding. Michelle recalls how working part time had advantages including a better WLB, concentrating better at work, she had a great relationship with clients (Michelle stated she never told her clients because of fear they wouldn't take her seriously as an attorney), and everyone is included and achieving the same goals, for example if employees feel they have a part in the decision making process they will become more engaged and contribute. Michelle believes working in a hierarchal business world can have disadvantages trying to balance work and family causes struggles for women to gain acceptance in a male business world.

## **2.9. New Generations of People, Technology and Corporate Culture**

Danilov (2010) comments that in relation to the new generation of educated adults entering into the workforce, countries are all attempting to do the same thing, to shape their upcoming generation's positive image on their country and its citizens. Danilov states the world's entry into a new century introduces a thriving generation of curious and ambitious adults and the workforce is always welcoming the new generation. The reading strongly suggests it is important for countries to shape the new generations to avoid making some of the same mistakes as before, noting that countries must not destroy their young adult's faith and ambition by holding onto past events. According to an article by Luttrell & McLean (2013) on a new generation of professionals, it states that by 2020 40% of professionals around the world will be taken by the new generation, however trying to find these people to employ involves having an open mind, having the ability to adjust, be innovative, have fun and give constant feedback. Referred to as "Millennials" in the article, they are the most technology savvy generation to date, they are competitive, innovative and look for alternative ways to complete the task in question and like to be free to innovate and grow. Millennials' bring a different outlook on certain tasks that can help the organisation according to Luttrell & McLean and employing a millennial means a company will have to update their company culture. Identified in the article companies like Google that promote a fun working experience and a fun WLB attracts millennials that want to work for a company that's fun and interesting that challenges them to do their best. This culture can be suggested to improve morale in the company and promote a better WLB. It can be argued that millennials are the future of business, it's constantly changing which suggests businesses should embrace the change and make the best of it. Luttrell & McLean (2013) believe people are now more educated, have travelled, hold more information/knowledge and are exposed to

a diverse workforce, also individuals are moving away from traditional working experiences and norms and updating them to remain competitive in business, individuals are trying new ways to develop themselves and now because people (Mainly women) are living longer lives can help their organisations develop too. However according to Frant (2009) the use computers and improved technology are skilled workers, and unskilled workers tend not to use a computer, this therefore suggests that the gap between skilled and unskilled workers is increased which in the future may lead to organisational problems. Also recorded in the study was the increase in computer use and a decrease in technology free working environments such as agriculture which suggests these jobs are decreasing with little employment that may lead to future organisational problems.

Corporate culture is suggested to have changed rapidly over the past decade, moving away from a male dominant way of working and moving towards a diverse workforce full of both men and women. However it can be argued that women are constantly under pressure to prove themselves to win respect in this male dominant society, having to show more commitment to the company to show their determination and spending so much time at work you can make strong relationships with colleagues so it's important for companies to find the right culture. Although it's suggested important to help employees feel a sense of belonging it's important to remember that everyone is there for a purpose and work towards company goals. Many employees can find it hard to switch off from work and may often find themselves working longer hours than expected, or bringing extra work home, therefore the barrier between home and work life can become blurred and employees working life takes over.

Williams (2014) states that concerns have risen over longer working hours and its harmful effects, known as "long hour's culture" the European Union has shown some interest into the problem. Williams believes businesses are interested to know how changing working hours can improve their efficiency and performance, also concerns of work pressures and intensification are highlighted as companies introduce flexitime into their company there is pressure on how it is used efficiently to maximise the outcome. The research states as a result of work intensification companies view it as building trust and cooperation, however some employers prefer to "sweat" their staff to achieve long term goals, for employees the main effects of this are exhaustion and having a work life imbalance, which is unhealthy for employees. Continuing on the reading comments that businesses can help employees to balance work and life with the help of technology, e working and tele-working enables them to work from home if they need to, it can have disadvantages as companies lose control of

employees who aren't present in the work place with most companies claiming that seeing people and teams in a room together raises productivity and trust among colleagues. The underlying message of the reading is that WLB ideas used by companies must find a best fit for the company and people cannot work on their own away from the office unless there is trust. Manuel G. Velasquez (2012) argues that corporate culture should be more caring and prioritize relationships within the Organisation. Velasquez explains how the focus of employees should not be on pursuing power, profit or personal goals, the focus should be on growing relationships among colleagues within the organisation, and those external to the organisation which it interacts with and by using the caring model of the organisation it focuses on the persons not on profit, caring is on a personal level. The reading argues If used correctly this model can change corporate culture and ethics of the company, employees feel cared for and not pressured. Problems can occur if there is too much caring or not enough caring therefore the main idea is to find the right balance for the Company.

### **2.10. Glass Ceiling**

Glass Ceiling is suggested to be a term used in the business environment referring to the certain barriers that women encounter to prevent rising up the corporate ladder, hindering career progression and impact balancing work and life for women. Even though there are a number of women in management positions research suggests that little are in senior management positions. Pandey, Pande & Singh (2015) comment that depending on the industry and the company culture it is harder/easier to climb to top Management positions, however having a glass ceiling in the organisation can have disadvantages for the company. The research explains the working environment is changing and growing, having more women in top management positions can bring different ideas to the table and help the business to compete, and with little percentage of women currently at the top of organisations women feel insecure, suffer low morale and confidence effecting their work ethic. Further explaining that female employees become less engaged because they maintain a constant battle between both work and family life, they juggle time between both constantly which is caused from society, at work there is pressure of glass ceilings and at home there are pressures to maintain a good family life making it harder for women balancing work and life. Concluding the reading it was hopeful commenting that more women are shattering the glass ceiling however there remains some gender imbalance. This imbalance is more connected to people's mind-set than company culture. According to

Bruning & Cadigan (2014) this issue reaches a global scale, commenting that around the world the rate of female management in organisations are very low, with some countries lower than others for example female senior management rate is lower in Asia compared to central Europe. It also explains the different industries that have different levels of senior female management, recording that healthcare had more female rates than transportation. The reading strongly suggested this is a big dilemma for global talent management for companies.

### **2.11. Competitiveness in the Corporate Sector**

Piperopoulos (2011) argued without a doubt the Corporate Sector is a competitive environment and with the help of marketing, customer services, being cost effective and new technology businesses are always competing against each other and in order to have a competitive advantage, innovation and technology are very important. To help an entrepreneurship succeed innovation is critical and having innovative opportunities helps the business to weight up their strengths and weaknesses, innovations can come from opportunities within the company or outside of the company for example unexpected occurrences may happen in the business that help innovation, Industry and market changes can help the business to take risks that will help the business, changes in perception from employees and customers can help and developing new knowledge can help to create innovations. Piperopoulos explains most innovations start small and develop over time, it requires hard work that's focused and a lot of effort however if innovation occurs it helps the business to create a competitive advantage over its industry and employees feel involved and recognised for their participation. There are concerns within the research as the emergence into the corporate market having to keep costs down and remain competitive can be a challenge, but this should be done as a business and not as individuals otherwise it can lead to work depression, exhaustion, stress and their health can suffer. Identified by the author Piperopoulos these better paid high skilled jobs can lead to burnout trying to remain competitive, these jobs are great for business, driving it to success but they come with a high personal price demanding a lot of the employee's attention making it hard to balance a good work life pattern. Lloyd (2001) however has some concerns over the matter of competitive organisations. The research explains that in order to remain competitive, organisations must have the "right" strategy for the business in terms of technology strategy and business

strategy however there are concerns over the risk involved and its impact on the business including the cost and reliability towards the company in order to remain competitive.

It can be suggested women face many difficulties within the workplace however there are some positives coming into the 21st century with a high rate of educated driven women in business. Helping women set up small businesses as an opportunity to move away from the traditional role in family and society, Markovic (2007) book "The perspective of women's entrepreneurship in the age of globalisation" aims to show women in a senior business role competing in a competitive business environment. The book highlights that today's business world is changing and women are choosing business ownership as a career path and as a result women account for 25% of businesses in leading market economies and developed countries around the world trying to move away from the gender imbalance and to change traditional views of females in the workforce. Markovic suggests the percentage of female entrepreneurs around the world is low and there is a need to promote and strengthen women entrepreneurship on the global level and support networks in dealing with competing business. She highlights that traditional trends are significantly changing the relationship between women and their involvement in business, moving away from the view as a primary household carer and although Ireland has come a long way and many of these views have changed, the percentage of women in senior management roles still remains lower than men. As mentioned before Nowadays women have the choice to have a career and a family and many do, but whether male or female if you are in a senior management role competing in the corporate sector it requires a lot of attention and work load that can take up a lot of one's time.

## **2.12. Summary**

Hariharaputhran (2015) presents a metaphor for the concept of WLB stating it is an act of juggling work, family, health, friends and spirit, the reading clearly outlines that priorities should be put in place. It also outlines that individuals should try to stop both work or family to spill over stating that it's important to work during working hours and leave work after working hours, give the required time for family friends and rest to give value to both aspects. The message of the reading is suggesting not to get too consumed, work will always take care of itself and to understand both family and work are the most important elements of anyone's life as they provide structure and pleasure to life however certain demands from both work and family life can cause conflict and put pressure on the employee. As stated



above in the literature review conflict between work and family are associated with low levels of work satisfaction and life satisfaction, therefore having a good WLB leads to high levels of work and family satisfaction which is much preferred.

Shanker & Bhatnagar (2010) state the Issue of WLB has been a concern over the past number of years in the working environment with an increase of globalisation and the changing nature of work, WLB is becoming increasingly important for employees and companies. They explain employees want a good atmosphere at work, a good wage, a great social life, and flexible working arrangements putting pressure on organisations to deliver. Main points concluding the literature review include that WLB is not only concerned with working families or couples or working mothers it is concerned with working individuals no matter what their family situation, and is not just balancing work and family but the rest of life activities also. As stated above in the literature review having an imbalance can lead to serious health problems for employees causing burnout, stress and harming your Psychological health. Also stated above women in particular in the organisation constantly feel as though they have to prove themselves in order to be taken seriously often working longer hours with bigger workloads and constantly being undermined can have a strain on the employee decreasing morale and employee engagement. However many researches reinforce that corporate environment is changing, it's moving away from gender discrimination and strict rigid cultures, and now more women are moving into senior management positions with new generations of talented young adults seeking employment the main focus for organisations is too gain a competitive advantage over their competition and also with new working patterns and flexitime being introduced by companies the main idea is to find the best fit for the organisation and its employees to help work towards the company's goals.

Now that women's life expectancy in Ireland is growing and more women are in high management positions, it can be argued there is a demand for flexible working arrangements for employees with childcare or eldercare responsibilities outside of work and this demand will only increase in the future with the population growing fast in Ireland causing poor WLB and high work family conflict. If employees are experiencing poor WLB or work-family conflict it decreases levels of productivity and engagement of the employee, the quality of work is lowered along with the individuals drive and effort at work. Organisations and Individuals need to understand the importance of good WLB and the effects of poor WLB can have on the employee's wellbeing, family life and work life.

## Chapter 3

### Research methodology

#### 3.1. Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was chosen for gathering data. This approach has been used by many researchers and based on the findings the author proceeded to use a quantitative method for this research and collection of data. A qualitative approach was also considered at the start of this dissertation as in depth interviews were a possible method of data collection however after analysing both approaches a quantitative approach was finalised as BPP Learning Media (2013) gave insight into each approach and it was believed that a quantitative approach would be more suitable.

According to BPP Learning Media (2013) there are many purposes and forms of research in their research project course book. They believed that on a personal level satisfying one's own curiosity is a very worthy purpose of study. They included there are many reasons for conducting research including trying to find data that advances knowledge and understanding of a particular topic, to identify and highlight business issues or to even provide a solution for existing problems, or it is also believed that the level of intellectual needs an individual may have for the topic will determine their motivation and commitment towards the study and the quality of their work. This study had an objective role throughout the dissertation, looking at relationships in data observes differences and similarities that can occur. BPP identified quantitative research is associated with structured collection of data and solely focusing on the data. The literature review was used to identify the different theory around the topic of WLB which was chosen by the author as components that could be observed. The author collected this data related to the topic in order to provide clear and efficient evidence. This theory was gathered as a base for formulating evidence that was assessed against the collected data. Quantitative research carried out in this dissertation was based on assessing the relationship between working females and their WLB, these variables were measured and analysed to result in accurate data for the dissertation.

### **3.2. The Research Instrument**

The research instrument used in this dissertation was a survey named “Corporate Women and Work-Life Balance”. This research was based around the data collected from Anjali Chauhan (2010) WLB survey carried out on 70 Indian working women and their WLB. The survey consists of six different sections: 1) Is work life balance a gender specific issue? 2) Ascertaining the demand for work life balance practices 3) Women’s family coping style 4) Women’s workplace coping style 5) Identifying challenges faced by women in balancing work and family and finally 6) Identifying the barriers faced by women at workplace. The survey was renamed “Corporate Women and Work Life Balance” by the author/researcher of this dissertation. The survey was renamed because there were an additional six questions added to the end of the survey therefore it was a slightly different survey, also the survey was renamed because this study was concerned with all females working in the corporate sector with different life situations which needed to be clear in the title of the survey presented. Individuals were also asked an additional six questions, including three open questions also created by the author/researcher. The researcher/author changed the wording of some of the questions within the survey to help participants understand better. Extra questions were added into the survey to try and gain further information into the topic in question. By adding more questions allowing participants to explain their own views and feelings on the topic it can help the researcher/author and readers to have a better understanding of the main challenges women working in the corporate sector face in relation to their WLB, And also if it is related to their Family Life. The additional six questions including three open questions (see appendix). These questions were added by the author/researcher to try and gain further information in more detail to gain a better understanding of the topic in question “Work Life Balance: What are the Main Challenges for Women in the Corporate Sector? Is it related to their Family life?”

An information sheet and consent form was also included in this dissertation. See appendix for survey, information sheet and consent form.

### **3.3. Sampling Strategy**

The sample used for this study was made up of female participants employed full time and part time within five different organisations in the corporate sector located and operating in Dublin including two accountancy firms' two insurance firms' and one law firm. The sampling strategy used for this study was not just limited to women working, who are married and have children as it can be suggested what often occurs in WLB studies. Rather participants included in the study from these organisations selected were all female, that were either married, in relationships, single, divorced, separate or widowed both with and without children working full time and part time. The purpose of this selection of females was to compare and contrast each of their view on WLB and the different challenges they experience relating to WLB and if these challenges are related to their family. The argument behind this study was that in previous studies all unmarried, or childless female employees have little or no challenges when it comes to their WLB compared to other women who are married and have children.

Out of the 140 surveys collected 121 surveys were completed in full, 19 responses were not appropriate. A total of 121 females participated in the survey. Of the 121, 39 Participants were married, the remaining were unmarried including 49 were single, 5 were divorced, 6 were separated, 1 was widowed and 21 were in a civil relationship. Also a total of 56 participants had children living at home while 65 participants had not.

The actual strategy used in this study consisted of two different distribution methods, each having their own strengths and weaknesses. They include email and Paper surveys (Edwards, 1997). In this study all of the participants were introduced to the survey by an information sheet explaining the objective of the study and the survey.

The procedure included:

1. The survey was distributed late in May 2015 an email was sent to a number of businesses operating in the corporate sector. This email gave an over view of the topic and a copy of the survey in which could then be passed onto employers and managers in a bid to try and get permission to distribute surveys within their company. Overall a total of five businesses gave permission to participate including two accountancy firms' two insurance firms' and one law firm.
2. The researcher/author visited four businesses in early June 2015 and a total of 170 surveys were distributed by hand by the researcher/author. Along with the surveys an information

sheet was handed out to explain the topic in detail and that it was a voluntary process. A secure box was placed in each company that participants could drop off their survey when completed. Each participant was informed the date of collection for the surveys.

3. One business had chosen distribute the survey by email around the organisation. In total 30 employees were emailed with the survey bringing the total number of surveys distributed to 200. Along with the information sheet an overview of the topic was sent and also the date of collection for the surveys. This was mainly because the company were very busy at the time so it was agreed that distribution by email would be more effective. A secure box was given to the company in case employees wished to drop off the survey in person.

4. In order to try and increase the response rate it was decided to implement a reminder to all participants to complete the survey. All five businesses were visited after 7 days and again after 14 days to collect surveys that were completed and to finalise a date to collect the remaining surveys. On day 21 the last of surveys were collected.

5. Finally of the 200 surveys distributed a total of 140 surveys were collected. All data was stored away in private and analysed to complete the thesis. Out of the 140 surveys collected 121 surveys were completed in full, 19 responses were incomplete, this was mainly because of incomplete answers, while some responses could not be obtained for various reasons.

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations**

All participants were advised that this was a voluntary procedure. Participants were also informed that their identity along with their company's identity would remain confidential. It was explained to participants that the survey was anonymous and doesn't include questions asking for personal details or asking for names of people or companies. Names of the organisations involved may only be revealed to examiners if requested during the presentation of this dissertation, other than that all information will remain confidential and it will not be revealed to any other person, nor will it be revealed in this dissertation. Participants would be provided with a copy of all results if requested.

### **3.5. Method of Quantitative Data Analysis**

After the survey was collected the researcher then had to analyse the data collected from the respondents. Data collected from the quantitative survey was analysed using descriptive statistics. Statistical analyses were undertaken using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). From this a number of tables and figures are presented to readers to show the results recorded from the respondents that participated in this study. As identified by Tromater (1985) that students have difficulties with SPSS it also applied to the researcher. With some help to understand the process of SPSS, the results began to take place and all data was transformed into a format that could be easily understood. This process involved identifying the reliability and validity of each scale presented in the survey and comparing if married respondents main challenges in relation to WLB where different to respondents who were not married. After all results were recorded an errors check took place. All scales and results were double checked to lower any changes of error. Scale scores were completed and analysed to obtain and compare results.

## Chapter 4

### Research Findings

#### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

This chapter presents the results from this study's survey. It includes the descriptive statistics and the results from the opened ended questions at the end of the survey. The results are broken into two sections including the results of the validity and reliability of each of the 7 scales in the survey including: 1) Is work Life balance a gender specific issue? 2) Ascertaining the demand for work life balance practices 3) Women's family coping style 4) Women's workplace coping style 5) Identifying challenges faced by women in balancing work and family 6) Identifying the barriers faced by women at workplace 7) Identifying negative effects of poor work life balancing. Finally results showing if there is a difference of married respondents compared to non-married respondents in relation to their view and main challenges with WLB.

##### 4.1.1. Is work life balance a gender specific issue?

This section presents the reliability analysis results as applied to the "Is work life balance a gender specific issue" renamed "Gender Balance Scale variable" in order to apply with SPSS requirements. A Cronbach Alpha value of  $-.182$  was identified for the Gender Balance consisting of 5 questions. According to Cho & Kim (2015) Cronbach Coefficient Alpha estimates reliability of a single test by using the data from that single test. Alpha being referred to as consistency which is internal and is the most frequently used reliability coefficient (an estimate of reliability) in organisational research. Therefore this result means this particular scale was unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents are presented in figures 1 and 2 respectively. The horizontal axis in each case represents the Gender Balance composite scale score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that indicated if they were married or not. For example, of the married respondents, figure 1 indicates that in total 19 respondents believed work life balance was a gender specific issue.

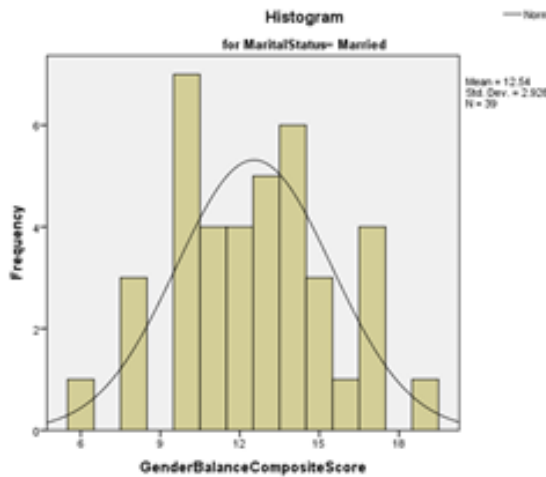


Figure 1: Histogram of Married Respondents

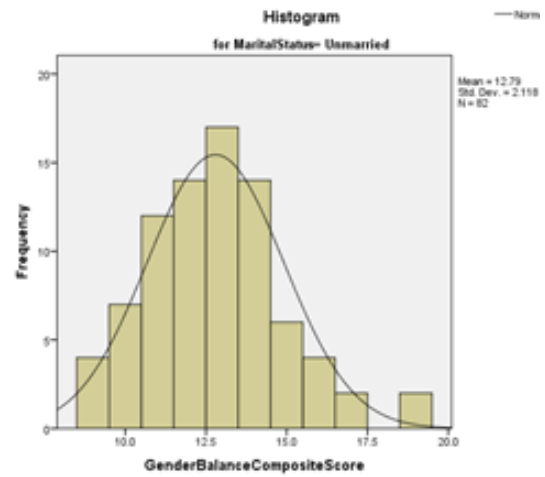


Figure 2: Histogram of Non-Married Respondents

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test are used to infer normality. The null hypothesis being that the sample is normal. In the case of the married respondents sample we infer normality ( $W_{\text{married}} = .978$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p = .618$ ), and in the case of the unmarried respondents sample we infer non-normality ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .958$ ,  $df = 82$ ,  $p = .009$ ).

Due to difference in normality, the Mann-Whitney Test was tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents. In particular this test tests for differences in mean ranks of both groups presented. The results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that there exists no significant difference. ( $Mdn=58.97$ ) for married respondents compared to non-married ( $Mdn=61.96$ ), ( $U=1520.0$ ,  $P=.658$ )

#### 4.1.2. Ascertaining the demand for work life balance practices

This represents the reliability analysis as applied to the “Ascertaining the demand for work life balance practices” which was renamed “demand for WLB Practices Scale variable” to meet the requirements of SPSS. A Cronbach Alpha value of .253 was identified for the WLB practices scale that consist of 4 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents are presented in figure 3 and 4 respectively. The horizontal axis represents in both cases presents the demand for WLB practices composite scale score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that are married or not. For example of the married respondents, figure 3 shows that 17 of respondents believed they needed to maintain a work life balance.



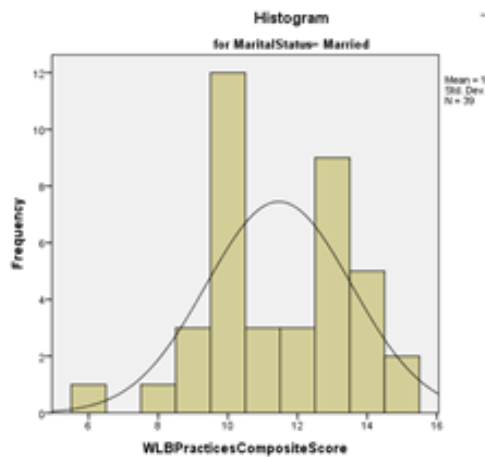


Figure 3: Histogram of Married Respondents

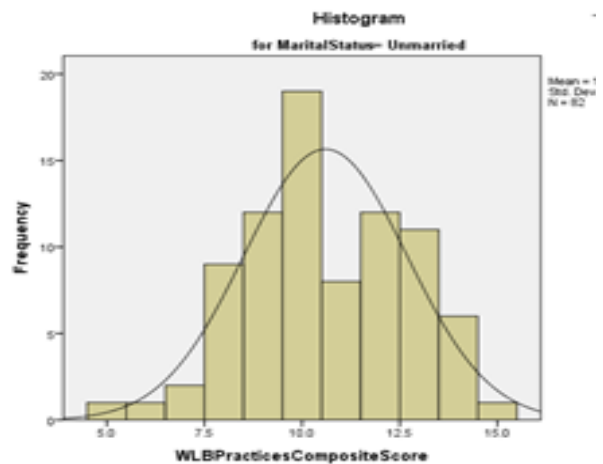


Figure 4: Histogram of Non-Married Respondents

The results of tests for normality show because the sig. value is less than 0.05 in the Shapiro-Wilk test that's used to infer normality for both married and non-married respondents the Mann Whitney test will follow because of the absence of normality in both married and non-married respondents. In both cases the results indicate difference from normality.

**( $W_{\text{married}}=.932$ ,  $df=39$ ,  $p=.021$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}}=.956$ ,  $df=82$ ,  $p=.030$ )**

Due to difference in normality, the Mann-Whitney Test was tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents in relation to demand for WLB Practices. In particular this test tests for differences in mean ranks of both groups presented. The results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that there exists a significant difference. **( $Mdn=70.71$ )** for married respondents compared to non-married **( $Mdn=56.38$ )**, **( $U=1220.5$ ,  $P=.033$ )**

#### 4.1.3. Women’s family coping style

This represents the reliability analysis as applied to the women’s family coping style scale variable. A Cronbach Alpha value of .468 was identified for women’s family coping style scale that consist of 7 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was slightly unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents are shown in figure 5 and 6. The horizontal axis represents women’s family coping styles composite scale score in each case with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that indicated if they are married or not. For example, of the married respondents, figure 5 shows that in total 18 respondents believed they maintained a good family relationship.

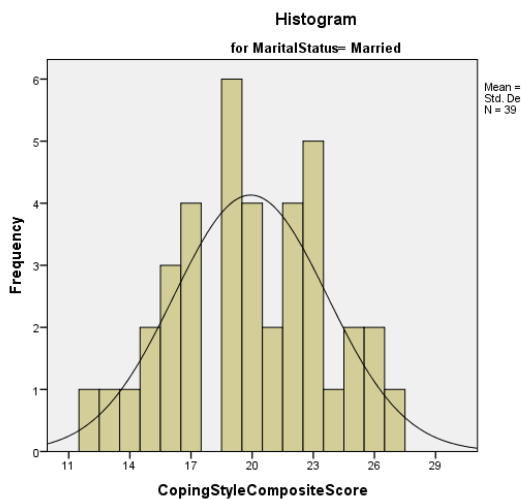


Figure 5: Histogram of Married Respondents

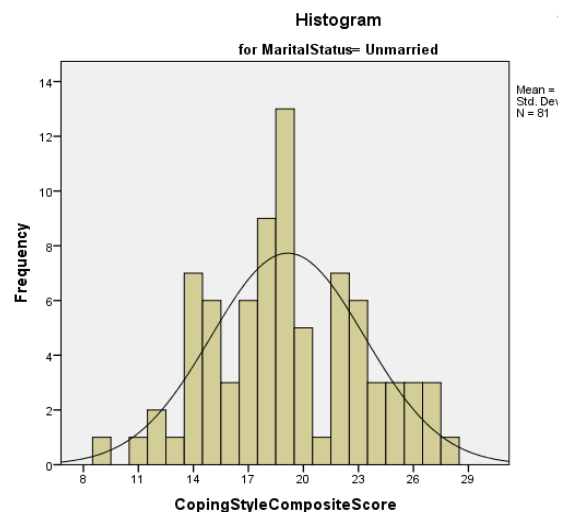


Figure 6: Histogram of Non-Married Respondents

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test are used to infer normality. The null hypothesis being that the sample is normal. The sig. value is greater than 0.05 for married respondents. There is normality in married respondents but not for non-married respondents. In this case the results indicate a difference from normality. ( $W_{\text{married}} = .979, df=39, p = .655$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .981, df=81, p = .263$ ) therefore a TTest will follow.

Due to the presence of normality, the Students’ TTest was tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents in relation family coping styles. In particular this test tests for differences in the means of both groups

presented. The results of this Students' TTest indicate that there exists no significant difference between the levels of family coping styles scores for married ( $M_{\text{married}} = 19.92$ ,  $SD = 3.77$ ) compared to unmarried respondents ( $M_{\text{unmarried}} = 19.15$ ,  $SD = 4.18$ ), ( $t(118) = .981$ ,  $p = .328$ ).

#### 4.1.4. Women's workplace coping style

This section represents the reliability analysis as applied to the women's workplace coping style scale variable. A Cronbach Alpha value of .158 was identified for women's workplace coping style scale that consist of 3 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents are presented in figure 7 and 8. The horizontal axis represents women's workplace coping styles composite score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents indicating if they were married or not married. For example, in figure 7, it indicates that of the married respondents 17 respondents believed they had a good workplace relationship.

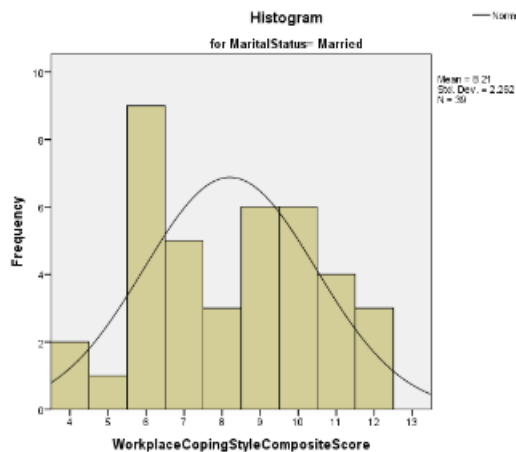


Figure 7: Histogram of Married Respondents

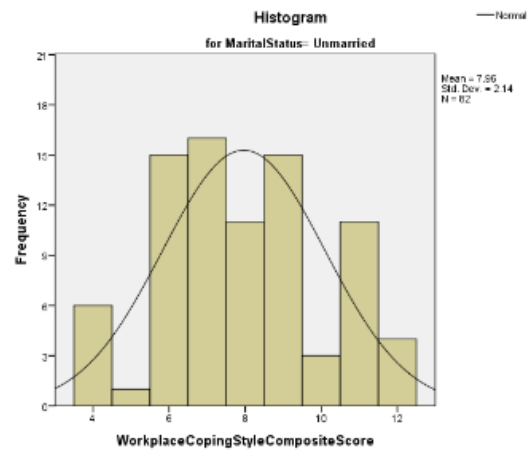


Figure 8: Histogram of Non-Married Respondents

The results of tests for normality are show because the Sig. value is less than 0.05 in the Shapiro-Wilks test of normality. It shows an absence of normality in both cases of married and non-married respondents. In both cases the results indicate a difference from normality. ( $W_{\text{married}} = .943$ ,  $df=39$ ,  $p = .048$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .949$ ,  $df=82$ ,  $p = .002$ )

Due to difference in normality, the Mann-Whitney Test tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents in relation to workplace coping styles. The results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that there exists no significant difference. **(Mdn=63.22)** for married respondents compared to non-married **(Mdn= 59.95), (U= 1512.500, p= .628).**

#### 4.1.5. Identifying challenges faced by women in balancing work and family

This represents the reliability analysis as applied to “Identifying challenges faced by women in balancing work and family” which was renamed “Challenges faced by women in WLB scale variable” to meet the requirements of SPSS. A Cronbach Alpha value of .278 was identified for challenges faced by women in WLB scale that consist of 7 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents in presented figure 9 and 10 respectively. The horizontal axis represents challenges faced in WLB composite scale score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that had indicated if they are married or non-married. For example, figure 9 indicates that of the married respondents, a total of 20 respondents believed women are facing challenges in relation to balancing work and family.

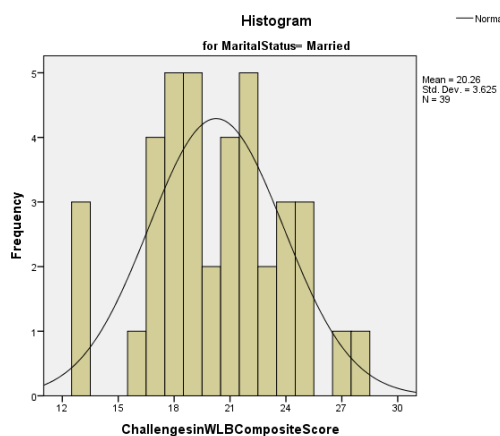


Figure 9: Histogram of Married Respondents

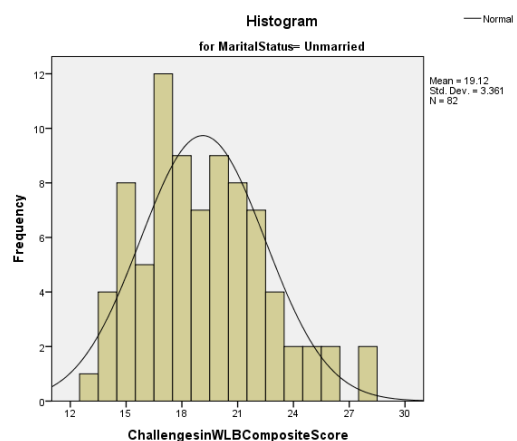


Figure 10: Histogram of Non-married Respondents

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test are used to infer normality. The null hypothesis being that the sample is normal. However because the sig. value is only greater than 0.05 for married respondents in the Shapiro-Wilks test of normality there is an absence of normality for non-married respondents. In this case the results indicate a difference from normality and a Mann-Whitney Test will have to follow. ( $W_{\text{married}} = .975$ ,  $df=39$ ,  $p = .520$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .967$ ,  $df=82$ ,  $p = .033$ )

Due to difference in normality, the Mann-Whitney Test tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents. In particular this test tests for differences in mean ranks of both groups presented. The results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that there exists a significant difference. ( $Mdn=69.45$ ) for married respondents compared to non-married ( $Mdn= 56.98$ ), ( $U= 1269.50$ ,  $p= .067$ ).

#### **4.1.6. Identifying the barriers Faced by women at workplace.**

This section represents the reliability analysis as applied to barriers faced by women at workplace scale variable. A Cronbach Alpha value of .021 was identified for barriers faced by women at workplace scale that consist of 7 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was unreliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents are shown in figure 11 and 12 respectively. The horizontal axis in each case represents barriers faced by women at workplace composite scale score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that indicated if they are married or non-married. For example, of the married respondents, a total of 24 respondents believed women are facing barriers at work.

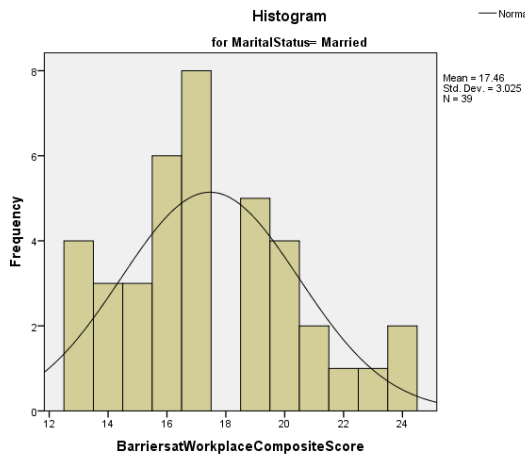


Figure 11: Histogram of Married Respondents

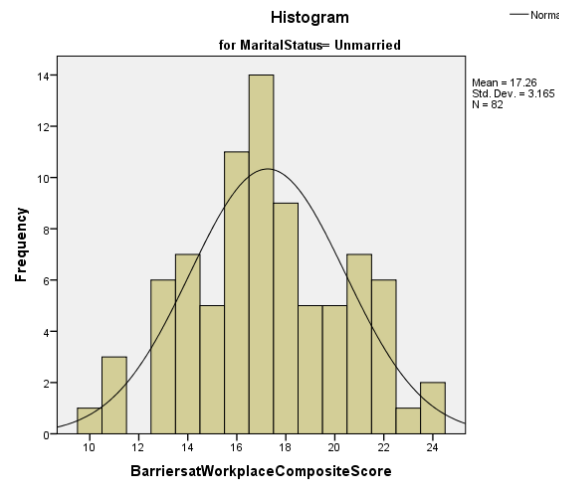


Figure 12: Histogram of Non-Married Respondents

The results of tests for normality are show the sig. value is less than 0.05 for both married and non-married respondents on the Shapiro-Wilks test of normality. There is no absence of normality. In both cases the results indicate no significant difference from normality. ( $W_{\text{married}} = .949$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p = .077$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .979$ ,  $df = 82$ ,  $p = .193$ )

#### 4.1.7. Identifying negative effects of poor work life balancing

This section presents the reliability analysis results as applied to the identifying of negative effects of poor WLB scale variable. A Cronbach Alpha value of .664 was identified for the identifying of negative effects of poor WLB consisting of 3 questions. Therefore this result means this particular scale was reliable.

Histograms of levels of married respondents and non-married respondents in presented figure 13 and 14. The horizontal axis represents the negative effects of poor WLB composite scale score with the vertical axis showing the number of respondents that are married or not. For example, of the married respondents a total of 13 respondents believed there were negative effects of poor WLB.

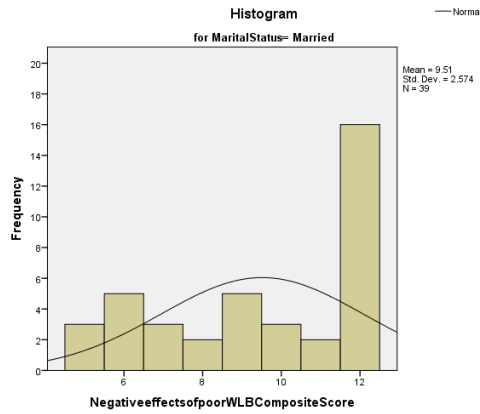


Figure 13: Histogram of Married Respondents

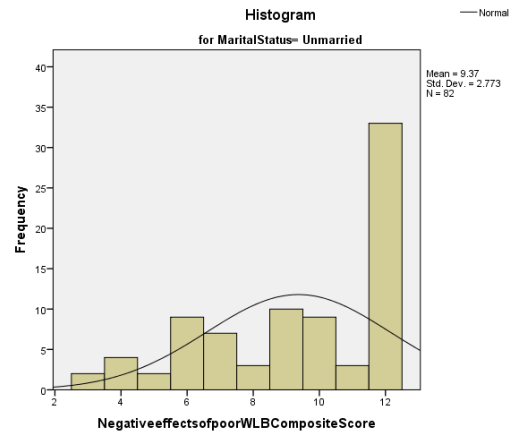


Figure 14: Histogram of Non-married Respondents

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test are used to infer normality. The null hypothesis being that the sample is normal. The sig. value is less than 0.05 in normality in both married and non-married respondents therefore a Mann Whitney Test will follow. In both cases the results indicate significant difference from normality. ( $W_{\text{married}} = .830, df = 39, p = .000$ ), ( $W_{\text{non-married}} = .848, df = 62, p = .000$ )

Due to difference in normality, the Mann-Whitney Test tested to identify if there was a significant difference between married and non-married respondents. The results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that there exists no significant difference. ( $Mdn = 63.22$ ) for married respondents compared to non-married ( $Mdn = 59.95$ ), ( $U = 1512.500, p = .628$ ).

## 4.2. Survey Results

The results recorded from the last three open-ended questions included some patterns and likeness between different women with different family situations however this was not always the case.

The first open-ended question presented to participants was “How would you summarise your work life balance?” from the results recorded there was a variety of answers. Some of the main findings included that very little women were satisfied with their WLB or found it hard to balance their WLB constantly working on their WLB. One respondent mentioning “I constantly feel tired trying to balance my working and social life, being a young female working long and demanding hours it’s hard to have a social life”. Another main result was the importance of family to all respondents, supporting them in terms of childcare and eldercare with one respondent commenting “My parents are great they always take my son when I can’t collect him from school, I would often spend up to 12hours at the office with big workloads, and it’s hard!.” Another main result recorded employers being unsupportive of employees WLB and giving no recognition for hard work with one respondent stating “it’s really frustrating when you are not recognised for taking on extra workloads or coming in early/staying late”

The next question asked participants “What could your employer do to improve work life balance in your organisation?” Some main results included that there was a demand for more flexibility including more flexitime (having the ability to come to work/leave early is needs be), flexible hours (extra hours worked up and the ability to take days off as needed as this allows you to take of the hours you have worked up), flexible work practices (for childcare/eldercare). One respondent mentioned “Introducing job sharing/working from home would be great although it would have to be monitored to ensure no employees are taking advantage”. Another main result was that employers needed to support their employees more with less workloads/deadlines, listening to ideas and taking them on board, providing better benefits and giving recognition for hard work, and encouraging employees to maintain a better WLB with one respondent commenting “I regularly put forward my ideas to my boss and get no answer it’s like he doesn’t care what I think. There are a lot of things that need to change in the office that need improving”. Finally more annual leave, bereavement leave, longer maternity leave and parental leave was needed with one respondent commenting that “6months maternity leave is needed- currently 4 months is just not enough”



The final question asked was if the participants had “Any other comments?” The main results from this question included positivity toward this topic. One participant stated “the more this topic is talked about, the more it will highlight the difficulties of WLB”. Another main result was the need and importance for support from employers. According to one respondent “whether an employee is working from home, works at home, works fulltime or part time, if they are happy with their decision and have support from their manager they will be a happier person”.

Overall from the results recorded that respondents believed the issue of WLB was closely linked to unsupportive employers. It was recorded that support from family helps employees with WLB and stress caused by work. Overall there is a strong need to prioritise and work on WLB as mentioned above many participants struggled to obtain a good WLB. It was also recorded that respondents strongly believed a poor WLB could lead to mental health issues and have serious consequences such as work family conflict and burnout. Finally it was recorded that employees strive on recognition and praise from employers for hard work achieved.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### 5.1. Research Question

The aim of this study was to establish the challenges related to balancing work and personal life for women. The sample population was made up of married women, single women, divorced women, women who are separated or widowed and women in civil relationships. The reason behind this because of the previous research conducted was solely concentrated on married women and their WLB however there was little research conducted on women in different family situations. Respondents were employees of five different Dublin based companies.

The research Question: “Work Life Balance: What are the main challenges for women in the corporate sector? Is it related to their family life?” was answered. The results confirmed negative effects of WLB such as high levels of stress from big workloads, mental health issues and work family conflict caused by long working hours were present. In addition the results confirmed that challenges of WLB stem from unsupportive employers that give no recognition for hard work and work pressures and the issue of WLB is not in fact related to family life. However previously mentioned by Chauhan (2010) challenges of WLB stems from family life, where the research of this study was based around, however from the data collected from this dissertation contradicts the outcomes of that study.

This study shows high levels of supportive family, spouse, and friends helping out with childcare/eldercare which helps to improve respondents WLB, which indicates that a strong supportive system is needed for individuals both mentally and physically. Identified in the results was a high demand also for recognition of employee’s hard work with one respondent stating “I’m currently working extra hours because it’s a busy time of year for the company, making extra effort but it is not recognised which annoys me” More employee outings, lunches/dinners were suggested to improve team bonding between colleagues and management which can help with employee relationships and trust and can promote loyalty and engagement. Results show pressures caused by demands from work including strict company structures and negative cultures negatively affected respondent’s wellbeing. The conflict between work and family negatively impacts on work and family satisfaction with one respondent admitting “currently I am experiencing some work family conflict, my

partner is aware I work a lot of hours and find it hard to take days off to book a trip away”, which identifies the question why are these companies unsupportive of their employees WLB? According to Fleetwood (2007) the employee has a legal right to request flexible working practices and employers may reject the request if the practice cannot match the company needs, however if employers are supportive of their employees and invest in these practices they want something in return. In relation to employer’s rights and duties it’s their moral obligation to help employees however they can, and with these requests employers often feel obliged to reciprocate, once an employer has granted flexible practices but then asking for something in return in the sense that if employees are happy in their job they can work better and with engaged employees can work harder and improve organisational performance. According to Sanchez-Vidal, Cegarra-Leiva & Cegarra-Navarro (2012) WLB practices are now becoming popular within the workplace because of the benefits identified for employers including organisational results through employee commitment, motivation and talent retention and employees including life satisfaction, wellbeing and less work family conflict. This has changed the perception of WLB practices in the workplace previously being identified as a less important aspect of the organisational culture. This research strongly reinforces the results found from this study, respondents demand more flexibility that will benefit the organisation and the employee.

## **5.2. Study Objective**

The aim of this study was to identify the main challenges involved in balancing work and personal life for women. Another aim was to analyse the relationship females have with the demands from work and responsibilities of personal life. Another aim was to identify if there was anything their employers could do to help employees manage their WLB. There were concerns when the results were tested in SPSS in relation to their reliability and validity. The survey was found to be unreliable in many cases. The results and theory presented in the study by Chauhan (2010) indicated that women’s career progression and work life imbalance was hindered because of family life interfering for women however this was not the case in this study. This study indicates that career progression is not hindered by family life and is hindered by unsupportive employers and organisational cultures/structures causing work life imbalance, stress and work family conflict. In a recent article by Solomon, Tobin & Schutte (2015) they identified that the validity and reliability of the study they were analysing about the effective behaviour support self-assessment needed improvement. It was recommended

that improvements needed to take place to bring up the score of reliability and validity of the study in order to move forward. Thanasegaran (2009) identifies that reliability and validity problems can occur in research and should be considered when investigating. The reading also suggests the continual issue of reliability and validity should not be undermined and investigators should share this knowledge and understanding.

### **5.3. Use of WLB practices and benefits**

Referring back to employee's demand for flexibility in their working arrangements including flexible working hours, working from home, job shares and flexitime several different respondents from different family situations believed they could benefit a lot from the introduction of flexible practices put in place at work. Kumar & Chakraborty (2013) also believe that with WLB practices in place employees and organisations benefit. They believe there is a close link between WLB and organisational performance and WLB is now regarded as one of the most important qualities of work. They comment the serious negative effects of work life imbalance recorded included divorce and infertility due to stress and continue on to explain employees now prefer flexible working arrangements due to social changes and with the presence of flexibility welcomes benefits for organisations and employees, including organisational image, improved quality of life, higher levels of satisfaction and employee retention. As previously mentioned flexible working practices are becoming increasing popular in companies however small businesses are now applying flexible working arrangements into their companies recorded by Management Services (2004). They state that more small businesses are introducing flexibility into the workplace including part time work, staggered hours, flexible working Locations, job sharing and flexitime. The benefits of flexible working arrangements recorded in the research by businesses include retaining of valuable employees, employees feel valued, and the reputation of the business was increased. The businesses reported they created loyalty and a motivated workforce with reduced absenteeism and increased organisational productivity. It was recommended in the reading that other businesses both small and large should implement these initiatives to remain competitive. It is suggested above that employees and organisations benefit from implementing WLB practices in the workplace and now the business environment is constantly changing, it's in the company's best interest to support their employees and remain competitive by implementing initiatives to help organisational performance.

#### 5.4. Limitations of Research

This study had some limitations, the first limitation being the sampling method used. The survey was distributed without the presence of the author therefore many employees may not have felt a big attachment to completing the survey therefore maybe there would have been a bigger response rate with the presence of the author. A total of 200 surveys were distributed around 5 different companies and in total 121 surveys were completed in full. Many individuals are too busy or find it too time consuming to participate in surveys. Surveys have many advantages and disadvantages being used as a sampling method. Edwards (1997) argues that surveys are the most popular method of quantitative research as they enable the collection of data from a variety of participants in an efficient way. Surveys have some strengths and weaknesses like every other research method that should be taken into consideration. According to Tung-Zong (2013) some weaknesses involved in surveys are finding the right questions to ask to the area of study and can be time consuming and frustrating. It's a difficult process because the survey needs to ask the right questions to collect the correct data to achieve the main objectives.

A second limitation are errors and bias that can occur in using surveys. As identified in the book "Survey Basics" (2013) there are four errors associated with surveys including: Coverage error occurs when participants don't all have the same opportunity to participate in the survey. For example conducting an online survey and some members of the target group live in areas around the country that have little or no access to internet. Sampling error occurs when only a subset of the population is targeted for a response rather than the whole population. Non-response error occurs when people targeted for the survey fail to respond that would contribute a lot of useful information to the data. Measurement error occurs when questions in the survey are worded wrongly or the right questions are asked in the wrong way. Wrongly worded questions, wrong distribution methods or the behaviours/attitudes of participants can effect measurement error. The questions presented in the survey based on the study by Chauhan (2010) were difficult to read and understand therefore people's interpretation of questions could be different to others when completing the survey. When individuals have different interpretations of questions it could have led to answers being rushed or not have been answered correctly.

A third limitation was in relation to the reliability result from this survey. The survey used by Chauhan (2010) which was also used in this dissertation obtained a low Cronbach Alpha

(reliability) score which was unknown to the author before distributing the surveys. Also to be taken into consideration respondents were completing the survey while at work which could have impacted the results as they may not have had much time to complete the survey or could have been influenced by their surroundings/people within the workplace and this should be considered in the future. When individuals are influenced it could have led to answers being rushed or not have been answered correctly. It could also influence their truthfulness in relation to work satisfaction or how employers can help with employees WLB. Next time to avoid this distributing surveys outside of work could be considered, on a neutral ground with no influences.

### **5.5. Recommendations of Future Research**

As mentioned above there has been extensive research conducted within the topic of WLB. This includes the main causes and implications that can arise from having a poor WLB however there is a need for more research regarding certain steps individuals can take to try and overcome work life imbalance. WLB with the help of good time management can have to multiple benefits including better health, relationships and satisfaction. Therefore further research into the topic is recommended.

It was suggested that challenges married women face in relation to their WLB was different to women who are not married because of their family situation however as the results show in this study that is not the case. Further research is necessary to understand why. As the research approach used in this study was a quantitative method, it is recommended that qualitative methods such as interviews are used in the research of this topic in the future to help form a better in-depth understanding.

In this study the aspects covered in the term WLB were only focused on the participants work life and family life. WLB refers to much more aspects of life including their extended family, personal time, leisure time. Future research should include broader aspects of WLB including the individuals close community and society.

The low response rate of 121 out of 200 surveys distributed shows that future research should conduct a greater population in order to increase the findings and receive better data. Also including employers and managers into the sample population can give more information about the topic from different employment sections within the company and help to create a better understanding.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1. Summary of Main Findings

As outlined earlier in the study WLB is an important topic for employees and employers and should be taken seriously otherwise it can lead to negative effects on the individual and their work and personal lives including mental health issues, work family conflict, satisfaction issues. This accounts for all employees, in particular young and middle aged adults which according to Gropel and Kuhl (2009) need to find the right balance of working and a social life. They recorded that having an efficient amount of time led to satisfaction of personal wellbeing and WLB for young working adults and is balancing act is a critical task that desires satisfaction between both elements. Respondents that participated in the survey for this study confirmed that WLB was an issue in their organisation and it was having an impact on their personal lives with some commenting it was impacting on their mental health and one respondent admitting it was causing serious family work conflict. It can be argued that employee engagement can decrease, meaning the quality and efficiency of organisational performance suffer's and as a result the companies' profits can decrease. The need to address the issue of poor WLB, the need for flexibility and unsupportive organisations and employers is evident.

It can be suggested that improved technology and cultural changes has changed work expectations increasing the demand of highly skilled people, also a rapid decline of traditional two parent households means it's financially becoming more difficult to support a household and have living and childcare/eldercare costs suggesting that employees have greater financial burdens causing parents to work longer hours with big workloads and high stress levels leaving many children in childcare facilities for longer hours. Employees feel unsupported within the workplace by employers as stated above. There is a strong need for flexibility and recognition within organisations which the results of this study identified. Referring back to the younger generation of technology savvy, enthusiastic, driven employees entering into the workforce that require flexibility and fun within the workplace, employers will need to change the organisational culture to remain competitive in the business world. The issue of WLB needs to be addressed and monitored. Without a doubt respondents reported that WLB was an extremely hard process to keep track of with some

respondents commenting that they had little success with their WLB. From the survey it was recorded that employee's main challenge with their WLB was finding the time to fit in other aspects of life because of the demands of work and unsupportive employers, however there was a strong support system at home mentioned by several respondents both married and not married.

It was also recorded that the use of WLB practices within organisations would support employees to obtain a better WLB. In a recent study carried out by Webber, Sarris and Bessell (2010) investigating employees attitudes towards WLB initiatives there were similar correlations of their results compared the results found in this study. For example, a large amount of employees were unaware of WLB practices available to employees in the workplace. Other results recorded from the study included that employees that used WLB initiatives such as flexitime, moving house leave and carers leave received more support from managers than employees who didn't use initiatives. One result recorded indicated employees that perceived they had little career damage used WLB initiatives whereas employees reporting higher levels of perceived career damage had not used and initiatives which indicates there are many benefits of WLB practices available to employees at work.

This study shows the main challenges women experience in relation to WLB, career progression and trying to achieve satisfaction are hampered by unsupportive employers, societal expectations and traditional view. In all five organisations surveyed most respondents agreed that this is linked to organisational cultures and structures. These respondents long for flexibility and support from their employers that would promote a healthy WLB and improve organisational performance but at the same time it was recognised that flexibility would need to be monitored closely, it was believed that this was necessary to monitor so the flexibility and responsibility would not be taken for advantage and it wouldn't act as a barrier within the organisation. To promote a healthy WLB, there is also a need for a strong support system from family, spouse and friends. The study indicates that although a number of women are finding it particularly difficult to manage their WLB with heavy workloads, deadlines and no recognition for hard work done, they are willing and trying hard to balance a healthy work and personal life to the best of their ability which can be seen as inspiring. It was recorded that employees seek understanding and recognition from the organisation to create a culture that recognises their hard work contributing to the company and in return the organisation should look at the needs of their employees and creating a work environment that supports their employees WLB and career progression through work practices that involve flexibility, support and recognition for employees and



support with childcare and eldercare to help women with their WLB would present the organisation as a supportive system that are contributing in their employee's needs. De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit (2005) took part in a study to identify the achievements and challenges of WLB strategies in Australian organisations, one point mentioned was the barriers in organisations to WLB practices which had strong correlations to issues presented in this study including an organisational culture that involves long working hours, a hostile and unsupportive working environment for employees that have personal commitments outside of the company, lack of communication, acknowledgement and education of WLB practices within the company. Likewise in a similar study by James (2014) based on the benefits that both employees and organisations can receive from WLB believes that by introducing WLB arrangements it decreases work family conflict and stress which helps to interact and communicate with colleagues, employees determination, concentration, motivation, engagement and creativity is increased, also employers can enhance the learning from other big companies to sustain long term competitive advantage. The main point in this reading was attracting and retaining a skilled diverse workforce with work teams and external contacts can help the organisation with problem solving and having the ability to adapt to changing markets and as a result organisational performance improves including worker productivity, labour turnover and competitiveness. The workplace would be much more appealing to women if such support and understanding was extended to them resulting in a loyal workforce and engaged employees. Mescher, Benschop & Doorewaard (2010) identified that many companies portray themselves as supportive structures to WLB in relation to their employees however this was found not to be the case. The study had shown a big difference between company's websites that verify their support of WLB practices and what they actually offer. The ideal employee is identified as full time employee willing to go the extra mile. In the study women's WLB practices are linked to childcare duties while men's WLB practices are linked to travel and sports. From this it can be suggested that companies that portray themselves as supportive of WLB practices may not always be the case.

The business world can be often described as very competitive and always changing. As stated above with improved technology, a younger generation of working candidates and a demand for flexibility within organisations the future business environment can be suggested to operate in a very different way to current organisations. According to IBEC (B) (2007) in an article based on the impact diversity and equality has on a business and its organisational performance identifies that the future organisation will be very diverse and

equal with the demand for highly educated and skilled employees to take on roles that are required in different types of cultures. IBEC state organisational performance has a close relationship with equality and diversity and it's in the employer's best interest to take action and implement policies and practices within the business to promote diversity and equality however these policies and practices will only benefit employees and employers if they are integrated into the organisations culture and strategy to help shape the business and how their employees work.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Recommendations**

#### **7.1. Recommendations for Employees**

Although it can be suggested from research that the topic of WLB is an issue that can never be resolved there are many recommendations that can be put in place to help individuals with this balancing act. Employees should take full advantage of any WLB practices available within their organisation, in many cases employees are unaware of the practices available. By raising awareness about WLB and its issues at work meetings, it highlights the importance of the topic and a need for WLB practices to be put in place. One of the main challenges of balancing work life and family life is the stress and hard work it involves, employees should take care and try to effectively deal with stress. Work will always take care of itself so it is recommended that individuals spend quality time with their family and often go on family outings. This will help identify the reasons behind causing an imbalance. One very important recommendation is to obtain good time management, this will help a lot when trying to balance all aspects of life. Developing a strong support system that is trusted can help a lot when juggling home life and work life for employees

#### **7.2. Recommendations for Employers/Companies**

Recommendations can also be made to employers and companies to help employees balance their work and personal life which in return will help the organisation. As mentioned above in many cases employees are unaware of WLB practices that are in place within the organisation, it is recommended that employees are educated on the practices available to them and the issues of work life imbalance. Giving employees more control of when and where they work can increase engagement and decrease the risk of interference from other aspects of life while at work, also introducing job sharing or shift work for employees and letting employees trade among themselves gives more control and satisfaction. Work closely with employees to create a supportive working environment, as a result employees feel supported and recognised for their work. Support and encourage all employees to use support systems available within the business, this assistance can make them feel at ease

improving self-satisfaction. Helping employees with personal life demands will also help employees feel supported, for example providing paid days off for childcare or eldercare, assistance with family programs put in place at work or even less workloads. It's important for employers and organisations to be supportive and understanding towards employees with personal life demands by implementing flexible working arrangements to help individuals that have many roles including parent, spouse and employee. In particular the organisation should pay attention to supporting working women and mothers in career progression within the organisation, by creating part time flexible options for working mothers and providing assistance with childcare it provides mothers with both family satisfaction and a chance for career progression as it should be in the best interest of the company to increase the productivity of their employees. Moving forward there are certain recommendations that employers and companies should take into consideration and work on to help with employee WLB practices. The use of a limited number of paid days off during the annual year for family/personal emergencies with short notice will greatly help employees. Maternity leave policies and more flexible working contracts should be taken into consideration also, and finally to work closely with and support working women and mothers in relation to childcare needs, career progression and WLB needs.

Moving on into the future it's important for employees to try and understand the importance of their WLB and the benefits that can come from having a good WLB in relation to family satisfaction, work satisfaction and self-satisfaction. It's also important for employers to understand that employees need help with balancing the everyday demands from home life and work life and it's in their best interest to help employees to obtain a good WLB. According to IBEC (C) (2012) in an article focusing on the mental health and wellbeing of employees within the business, there are several steps managers and employers can take to take care of their employee's mental health and wellbeing. Firstly educating employees on the facts about mental health and the different types of mental health problems including depression, bipolar disorder, personality disorder, Anxiety disorder and Psychosis and schizophrenia and the importance of mental health at work. Next promoting wellbeing to employees including managing stress, wellbeing strategies, their employee engagement and WLB. The main goal in the reading for employers and managers is early prevention of mental health problems including identifying the early signs of distress and possible signs of mental health problems and how they can be overcome and by simply listening to individuals problems or worries in confidence can greatly help as it lets them know they are not alone and have support available to respond to their worries or problems. The article also explains

steps that can be put in place if an employee is already experiencing mental health problems including maintaining contact with the employee throughout their problems and communicating with management and staff within the business, it may involve making some adjustments within the business and being aware and if an employee is experiencing problems it's important that there is support to manage this illness while working.

The results of the survey outline that through the help of WLB practices such as flexi-time, job shares, flexible hours, less workloads and more recognition employers are providing their staff with a helping hand. This is mainly because if employees have a work life imbalance it affects their drive and engagement at work. The survey results show that there are many challenges women face in relation to their WLB that work in the corporate sector, however this is not related to their family life.

### **7.3. Costing's**

There are many recommendations listed for employees and the employer/organisation moving forward. In order to help employees and put these recommendations into action several steps need to take place to organise how the recommendations would work, there costing's and the timescale involved in implementing the recommendations. Firstly a monthly meeting could be set up for all staff and management with the objective that employees can highlight any issues they have at meetings, also employers can highlight the use of WLB practices in place at the company and educate employees on the issues of WLB and how to obtain a good WLB. This monthly meeting would take place at 8:30am and continue until 10am, therefore employees and management are away from their desks for only 1hour. There would be little cost as these meetings are internal and conducted by management however breakfast would be provided which would be a cost of €150 to the company.

Secondly HR, management and employees would work closely together to create a supportive working environment, this would involve setting up an employee database closely monitored by HR which allows employees to freely trade when and where they work including job sharing and shift work promoting flexible working arrangements. This database would also include the notes from the monthly meeting, however this would mean an employee from HR updating the database meaning more workload. Employees could also include paid days off for family emergencies with short notice which is all under the eye of

management and HR. This would involve a one day training programme for HR and employees on the new database. This could take place at the monthly meeting and also would require an external programme developer to train employees. This would cost the company €850 and time in setting up the new database.

Thirdly with the use of paid days off for childcare/eldercare or family emergencies this would involve a big cost to the company to set back deadlines however would be greatly supportive to employees.

Lastly introducing flexible working arrangements, better maternity leave policies for women would involve a change in working contracts for employees meaning an updated contract for employees to accept therefore HR would update contracts and with acceptance from management employees can then agree. This would cost the HR department and management a lot of time (2weeks) to decide on updated contracts, distribute contracts and collect agreed contracts, this would cost the company €200 as this procedure is being conducted outside of working hours therefore employees need to be paid for updating contracts.

In order to work out if these costing's will benefit employees and the organisation there needs to be a return on investment. Working out the return on investment is calculated by dividing the net profit by the cost of investment and multiplying by 100. For example:  
 $300/1,000 \times 100 = 30\%$

## **Personal Learning Reflective:**

There are many main aspects or main events that have presented a learning curve in the process of researching and writing a dissertation and throughout the year as a master student. This experience has exposed a lot of qualities in myself I never knew I had and also exposes a lot of qualities I need to work on as an individual about to start my career. For example throughout this experience I have learnt that I can be very precise and patient in certain situations that require attention and detail. For example when data collected from the survey presented in this study and the process of SPSS started I was not experienced in this area and found it quite difficult to learn however I had a lot of patience and eventually overcame this difficulty leading to the end results. I also learnt that there are certain qualities that I need to work on including good time management for example when collecting surveys from companies on their collection date the time needed for transport between companies was slim therefore better time management is needed. Not only was the whole experience of this dissertation challenging, time consuming and exhausting at times, it also involved a sense of achievement and gratitude to everyone who helped me along the way. I have had a lot of support over the past year which really helped. There are certain aspects of the dissertation that are quite challenging for example when choosing the survey that suits the topic of choice, keeping up your motivation during the summer months to complete the dissertation or understanding how time consuming the process can be is quite challenging at times. When I first started to research the main topics I believed would suit my area of interest for this dissertation I felt completely overwhelmed and out of my depth however this feeling has totally changed to how I feel now coming to the end of my experience and looking back it seems so long ago. Trying to kick start the dissertation was a struggle as to pin pointing which topic to pick, the research question and choosing which method is better suited for the topic, at times I felt I wanted to change my topic however I have learnt that it's better to pick a topic and stick with it. One main aspects of this process that I have learnt is the importance of organisation and planning that is involved in carrying out a study. There are a lot of aspects involved in writing a dissertation that are all important and need focus. The planning needed for each aspect of the dissertation including allocating equally divided time to typing, researching, and collecting data needs to have equal allocated time to complete. Organising the distribution of surveys, collection and every aspect of the dissertation requires a lot of attention and focus.

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## **Appendix**

### **Corporate Women and Work-Life Balance**

Hello, my name is Amy O Carroll and I'm currently doing a Dissertation as part of my degree in Human Resources in the National College of Ireland. The topic of study I am undertaking is on work life balance in the working environment. This was really interesting to me because I'm very interested in employee's engagement and what motivates employees to do well in their workplace, how one can influence the other and what are the main factors that hinder this motivation.

I decided to concentrate solely on women, this is mainly because I'm very interested in the female workforce and how it has changed so much from traditional times and how they constantly are multi-tasking their private lives and work.

The idea of the study is for women to answer this survey which examine work life balance and their main issues and challenges regarding this balance. This survey is anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire will take approx. 10-12 minutes and all data will be secured and stored away safely. I would really appreciate it if you could take the time to complete the survey as it would really help with my study.

Thank you for your time,

Amy O Carroll, 0871350233

## Consent form

I consent to take part

I do not consent to take part

Signature:

## Corporate Women and Work-Life Balance

### Marital status:

Married:      Single:      Divorced:      Separated:      Widowed:      Civil  
Status:

### Do you have Children living at home?

Yes:      No:

Partly Yes Yes    No    Can't Say

Do you think that work life balance is a gender specific Issue?

Can you postpone your responsibilities like spending time with  
Husband, parents, in-laws and children?

Are you perfectly able to balance your work life?

Do you normally get time to spend to yourself?

Could you compromise on the quality of your work life  
balance?

Family is more important than career in your life

Are you satisfied with your present achievement/enjoyment?

Is your individual identity lost, while juggling your various roles?

Do you feel the need for maintaining work life balance?

Do you accept help to balance your work life from your family?  
(Spouse, parents, in-laws etc.)

Is your happiness shared with friends and family?

Do you budget your time both in and out of the office?

Its financially difficult to support a family with one salary

Do you go for family outings, visits, tourists place often?

If you had a spouse or partner whose income fully supported

You and your family, would you continue to work full time if

You Have children?

If you were able to get high quality day care for your Child(ren), would you continue to work full time?

Yes No Can't Say

Partly Yes

Do you think that your growth opportunities are limited at work?

Do you believe reasons for imbalance are because of long working Hours, Lack of support, unclear demand, lack of growth

Opportunity, motivation and Recognition

Working hard and having success is important to me

Are maternity leave policies favourable in your organisation?

Parenthood remains more difficult for women than men

Primary responsibility for childcare at home is you

Are you allowed flexi hours in your office?

Are you permitted to take leave for family purposes?

Are you allowed to come in late to office sometime?

In today's society it's difficult to have a family and work fulltime

Are you recognized for your contribution in your organisation?

Do you face any major family work conflict?

Do you get support from your organisation/employer?

Does your family support you by sharing household

Responsibilities?

I think society would look down on me if I choose to work full Time if I have children.

I think society would look down on me if I choose to stay at Home full time if I have children.

Can you postpone your career aspiration, taking up childcare Duties?

Do you think there are negative effects of poor work life balance?

Do you think poor work life balance can affect your psychological Health?

Can your employer help work life balance by implementing



Family-friendly initiatives such as flexi time, childcare support etc.

**How would you summarise your work life balance?**

**What could your employer do to improve work life balance in your organisation?**

**Any other comments?**

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire**